



One evening in 1968, when I was 8 years old, my sister and I were playing with an Ouija board. Most folks view Ouija boards as harmless parlor entertainment, but some people think the device lets them communicate with spirits. My sister and I asked all sorts of childish questions. Then we decided to ask the board to predict the dates when all the members of our family would die. Person by person, the board pointed out the fatal years. These dates ranged from around 2020 to 2040, and all seemed plausible to me. When we asked about my date of death, the board replied with the year 1982. At the time, this did not concern me be-

cause, as an 8 year old, 14 years in the future seemed an eternity, and I didn't believe in Ouija boards anyway.

Nevertheless, my experience with the Ouija board always seemed to lurk in the back of my rational mind. In 1982, I was commissioned and entered flight training in Pensacola.

Someone once asked me how I felt about the risks involved in naval aviation, and I remember saying, "It's not too dangerous because I usually have an instructor with me to keep me out of trouble." Flight training progressed smoothly. I had no close calls. By December, though, the little voice in the back of my head would not let me forget the Ouija's prediction.



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Photo-composite by Allan Amen

On Dec. 30, 1982, I was ready for my final flight of the year: the navigation solo. My pucker factor was way up there. The day's forecast almost precluded solos because of projected winds and rain. But the weather held up well enough to launch. I took to the air, focused on safely transiting to the working area, navigated to a series of geographic locations, and started completing the mandatory maneuvers. I didn't skip a single navigation check point or maneuver (I was afraid of being caught cheating by some unseen flight instructor who might be stealthily monitoring my progress).

Then, halfway through the hop, I got a radio call reporting that all solos were being recalled

immediately to Whiting because of deteriorating weather. My memory of the Ouija board's prediction began to surface, and a sense of unease settled in. I worked my way back to Whiting, dodging numerous low-lying clouds. Home field was reporting 10-knot crosswinds, more than I had seen before, but within limits for solos. A light rain was sprinkling the area. I heroically mustered all of my fledgling aviation skills and landed. Taxiing back to the line, I already was mentally celebrating. I had defeated the Ouija board's prediction and was ready for the New Year's weekend. I taxied in and shut down.

I reported to the ODO, "Mission complete."

He said, "Why didn't you check in with me on the radio prior to shutting down? You're fifteen minutes short, and I want you back in the local bounce pattern to complete the X. Go check out another aircraft."

I was stunned. I thought I'd dodged a bullet, but now the specter of my demise while flying in the "within limits for solo flight" local weather pervaded my consciousness. But I had no choice. Refusal to comply with the ODO was not an option. Just as I turned toward Aircraft Issue, the squadron ops officer chimed in. "Hey, we can waive that fifteen minutes if everything else was completed." He gave me the option of flying some more that day. I respectfully declined.

So there I was, New Years Eve, 1982. I spent a quiet evening at home. 🦅

Cdr. Watson is the XO of VT-28.